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BARANĪ'S THEORY OF THE HISTORY OF THE DELHI SULTANATE

Irfan Habib

If the variety of opinions formed about a writer were an index of his greatness, then the tormented spirit of the author of the *Tārīkh-i Firūz Shāhī*, Zīā' Baranī,¹ may now rest in peace. Elliot held him to be an "unfair narrator",² and Dowson fretted that he was "sparing and inaccurate in dates", and "wanting in arrangement".³ The latter also thought that he was "narrow-minded and bigoted like Muhammadans in general".⁴ Peter Hardy concludes that Baranī treats "history as a branch of [Muslim] theology".⁵ And yet Dowson himself admitted that "Baranī's work approaches more nearly to the [modern] European idea of history", and, in contrast to Hardy's judgement, found that Baranī "has a care for matters besides the interests of his religion and the warlike exploits of the sovereign representatives of his faith".⁶ Mohammad Habib, after carefully analysing Baranī's ideas in his *Tārīkh-i Firūz Shāhī* and the *Fatāwā-i Jahāndārī*, judges the *Tārīkh* to be "the greatest book that has survived to us from the Sultanate Period".⁷

There is no doubt that Baranī's eminence lies precisely in his scorn for mere annalistic narration; he has a theory of history which he openly holds and, more or less, consistently applies.⁸ In this he is unique in the entire range of medieval Indian historiography. I propose in this paper to examine the principal elements of Baranī's theory, as he saw them, and the way he interpreted the history of the Sultanate in their light.

- 1 The name conventionally used for the historian, Zīā'uddīn Baranī is not authorized by him; it, however, goes back to the late fourteenth century, for Amīr Khwurd in his *Siyar-i Auliya'* (Chiranjī Lal, Delhi, A.H. 1302, pp.312-3) calls him Zīā'u'l Millat-wa-uddīn. On all the numerous occasions that Baranī refers to himself in the *Tārīkh-i Firūz Shāhī*, ed. Saiyid Ahmad Khan (Hib. Ind., Calcutta, 1862, pp. 9, 25, 123, 125 and passim; this edition is henceforth cited as *Tārīkh*), he styles himself simply Zīā' Baranī; so also in *Fatāwā-i Jahāndārī* (India Office MS. Pers. 1149, f 1b). "Zīā'" could have been his poetic pen-name; "Baranī" or "Barnī" may indicate that he was born at Baran (modern Bulandshahr), though this is not otherwise established.
- 2 H.M.Elliot and J.Dowson, *The History of India As Told by Its Own Historians*, iii (London, 1871), 95.
- 3 Ibid. p. 96.
- 4 Ibid. p. vii.
- 5 *Historians of Medieval India* (London, 1960), p.39.
- 6 *History of India As Told by Its Own Historians*, iii, vii.
- 7 Mohammad Habib and Mrs Afsar Umar Salim Khan, tr., *Political Theory of the Delhi Sultanate* (Allahabad, n.d.), p. 172.
- 8 Cf. Hardy's recognition that Baranī's *Tārīkh* "is the vigorous and trenchant expression of a philosophy of history which lifts Baranī right out of the ranks of mere compilers of chronicles and annals" (*Historians of Medieval India*, p. 20). My reading, however, of what Baranī's theory of history was greatly differs from Professor Hardy's; and that is one of the reasons behind this paper. In general, I find myself closer to H.Mukhia's remarks on Baranī in his *Historians and Historiography during the Reign of Akbar* (New Delhi, 1976), pp. 19-26.

I

Baranī has conveniently given a statement of his historical philosophy in the preface to his *Tā'rikh-i Firūz Shāhi*.¹ He offers us the scale of social values which he sets up to assess historical action. Baranī's point of view, his purpose in studying history, is geared to the interests of the ruling class. This is not merely admitted; it is stridently proclaimed:

The science of History is the account of the great qualities, merits, virtues, and traditions of the great men of the Faith and State; it is not an account of the worthless, the mean, the lowly, the base-born, the men of the market-place.²

Indeed, history was properly a science meant only for the high-born:

The writing of history and the science of History are proper only to the grandees, notables, great men and sons of great men who are possessed of the quality of justice, truth and rectitude.³

For them, history is a handmaid for action, since they can use its lessons for their own good. For this reason history cannot simply be a chronicle of the meritorious deeds of the past, but must encompass all aspects, good and bad. As Baranī notes:

The science of History is the account of the past, including the good acts and the wicked, justice and cruelty, the worthy and worthless, laudable and odious deeds, acts of obedience and rebellion, and virtuous as well as base conduct, so that readers of later generations may take a warning and obtain knowledge of the gains and risks (lit. injuries) of government (*jahāndārī*) and the good and bad deeds of worldly men.⁴

A historian must himself belong to the upper classes (*az akābir o mā'ārif*), to speak in their interest.⁵ At the same time he must be rigorously truthful. Baranī insists that for this it is necessary that he should be of correct religious views, and he warns Sunnīs against the secret heretical subversion of history.⁶ But this is a brief digression; and Baranī soon returns to his main theme: even if the historian cannot speak frankly about his own time out of fear, he should write truthfully about the past.⁷ Here, perhaps, he seeks to furnish an apology in advance for the eulogistic nature of his own account of the reigning Sultan;⁸ but equally, of course, he enters an assertion of the veracity of the rest of his book.

In his Introduction Baranī makes it clear that the ideal ruling class that he addresses himself to is not necessarily wholly identical with the actual ruling class. Hereditary

1 *Tā'rikh*, pp. 9-24.

2 Ibid. p. 9.

3 Ibid. pp. 12-3.

4 Ibid. p. 13.

5 Ibid. p. 14.

6 Ibid. pp. 14-5.

7 Ibid. p. 16.

8 The account of the first six years of Firūz Shāh's reign (1351-7) is contained in the *Tā'rikh*, pp. 527-602.

right is a crucial element in the social values that he upholds. Where this is disregarded, not only is the ruling class corrupted, but the historian, too, loses his real audience and thus his status:

As the condition of hereditary claim (*shart-i naṣb*) was no longer observed for occupying the throne of the Sultans, the office of Viziers or the position of nobles and governors, and sovereignty went by force and Viziership by (mere) good management and competence, the popularity of the science of History and the splendour of Historians suffered (in proportion).¹

These are Baranī's first principles. He makes no claim that they derive from Islamic theology; he knew theology too well for that. These were in fact universal truths, traceable to pre-Islamic Sassanid Persia where they were fully honoured.²

II

According to the qualifications he himself sets for a historian, Baranī had a perfect right to chronicle the history of the Sultanate, since his was a family of some status.³ His father was the daughter's son of Jalālu'ddīn, a prominent Saiyid of Kaithal.⁴ The daughter herself, that is, Baranī's grandmother, was a Saiyid lady of "mystical attainments."⁵ Of the status of his paternal line, he speaks no more than to say that it was "illustrious" (*sharif*).⁶ His was thus a family of a scholarly and religious background. But from a position of mere *dānishmands* (scholars), its members had risen to high bureaucratic posts before Baranī was born (1285).⁷ His maternal grandfather, Sipahsālār Husāmuddīn, was an official (*wakīl-i dār*) of Malik Bektars, the *bārbak* of Sultan Balban (1266-86)⁸ and held the police charge (*shahnagi*) of Lakhnauti during Balban's expedition to Bengal.⁹ Baranī's father Mu'ayyidu'l Mulk became *nā'ib* (deputy) to Arkālī Khān, son of Sultan Jalālu'ddīn Khaljī (1290-6),¹⁰ and in the next reign, the governor (*nā'ib-o-khwāja*) of Baran.¹¹ But the most eminent position was obtained by Baranī's uncle 'Alā'ul Mulk, who having been privy to 'Alā'uddīn Khaljī's plot against Sultan

1 *Tārīkh*, p. 18.

2 Ibid. He also cites "sayings" of Aristotle and Buzurjmihr (Prime Minister of Nausherwān) in support of his assertion of the great value of history (*Tārīkh*, p. 11).

3 For biographical sketches of Baranī, see S. A. Rashid, "Ziaud Din Barni—A Study", *Muslim University Journal* (1942), pp. 248-78; and Mohammad Habib, "Life and Thought of Ziauddin Baranī", in *Political Theory of the Delhi Sultanate*, pp. 117-72.

4 *Az'uzzam o kirām-i sādāt-i Kaithal* (*Tārīkh*, p. 350).

5 *Kashf-o-karāmāt* (lit. access to inspiration and miraculous powers), *Tārīkh*, p. 350.

6 *Tārīkh*, p. 350.

7 Baranī's year of birth is established by the age he gives himself, seventy-four (lunar) years, when he completed the *Tārīkh-i Firūz Shāhī* in 1357 (*Tārīkh*, p. 573).

8 *Tārīkh*, pp. 42, 60-1, 119. On page 42 the words in the printed text *wakīl-i dār o Bārbak-i Sulṭān Balban* should read *wakīl-i dār-i Bārbak-i Sulṭān Balban*.

9 *Tārīkh*, p. 87.

10 At this time he had built a "tall house" at Kilokhari in Delhi (*Tārīkh*, p. 209).

11 *Tārīkh*, p. 248.

Jalālu'ddīn Khālījī, was rewarded first with the government of Kara and Awadh,¹ and then with the office of *kotwāl* (city commandant) of Delhi.² Baranī cites all these three men as oral witnesses for one episode or another recorded in his History. Baranī himself did not apparently hold any bureaucratic employment till about 1334-5, when he was appointed an aide or confidant (*muqarrab*) to Sultan Muḥammad Tughluq (1325-51).³ He held this appointment till the Sultan died. These seventeen years of proximity to that brilliant and tempestuous man gave to Baranī, who prudently remained a pliant yes-man,⁴ a unique experience of the inner functioning of a despotic monarchy.

With Muḥammad Tughluq's death, Baranī's bureaucratic career came to an abrupt end. The six years of Firūz Shāh's reign that he is compelled to portray as an age of universal happiness were for him a time of unmitigated tragedy. Stripped of office,⁵ imprisoned for some time in the fortress of Bhatnair,⁶ he "fell among a host of perils".⁷ He was penniless and neglected, toothless, nearly blind and an invalid,⁸ yet driven from door to door by his needs.⁹ Seventy-four (lunar) years of age,¹⁰ he could only look back on his past life with a deep, if cynical, sense of dissatisfaction; he had failed to enjoy sensual pleasures in this world, and made no provision for the next.¹¹ The latter apprehension made him compose a tract in praise of the Prophet;¹² and he might have written other pious tracts as well.¹³ But his worldly interests, fortunately for us, were not smothered by holy impulses. He prepared a translation of an Arabic history of the Bermecides¹⁴ and a text on the problems and traditions of royalty, the *Fatāwā-i Jahān-dāri*.¹⁵ These works showed Baranī's concern with the problems of political structures. In 1357, as a crowning achievement, came the *Tā'rikh-i Firūz Shāhi*.

It is not to be doubted that Baranī's personal tragedy exercised some influence on

1 Ibid. pp. 222, 248.

2 Ibid. p. 250 & c.

3 Baranī recognizes that he had been "picked up and raised (to office)" by Muḥammad Tughluq (*Tā'rikh*, p. 467), and that he remained in his service as a *muqarrab* for seventeen years (p. 504; see also pp. 466, 497, 516).

4 *Tā'rikh*, pp. 466-7.

5 Ibid. p. 125.

6 See Baranī's Introduction to *Sahīfa'i Na't-i Muḥammadi*, extracts translated by Mohammad Habib, *Political Theory of the Delhi Sultanate*, p. 162; cf. *Tā'rikh*, p. 554.

7 *Tā'rikh*, p. 557 (*dar Mahālik-i gunāgūn uftādām*).

8 *Tā'rikh*, pp. 165, 201, 205.

9 Ibid. p. 466. As pointed out by Mohammad Habib, op.cit., pp. 118-9, the account in *Siyarū'l Auliya'*, p. 313, of Baranī's last days is wholly incorrect; by an almost instant pious legend the forced poverty of Baranī is presented as voluntary retirement.

10 *Tā'rikh*, p. 573. Here, as elsewhere (p. 556), he also puts his age at two and a half *qirāns*, or seventy-five years.

11 *Tā'rikh*, pp. 200-1.

12 *Sahīfa'i Na't-i Muḥammadi*, introduced by S. Nurul Hasan in *Medieval India Quarterly*, i, nos 3-4, 100-6.

13 These works are named in Amīr Khwurd, *Siyarū'l Auliya'*, p. 313.

14 C. A. Storey, *Persian Literature: A Bio-bibliographical Survey*, i, section ii, fasciculus 3 (London, 1939), 507; ii (London, 1953), 1082.

15 Not published, but translated in *Political Theory of the Delhi Sultanate*.

his *Tā'rikh*. He could now see with the most fervent vividness men, events and circumstances as they moved inexorably towards a denouement in one cycle after another, each act of glory followed by a grim, total eclipse. But it was for him a case more of enhanced, than of coloured, vision. For this man in his seventies, with all his material destitution and physical infirmities, had yet a mind and a store of memories with which to construct a cogent and brilliant interpretation of the history of the Empire he had served.¹

This interpretation is largely in conformity with the basic precepts laid down in Baranī's own Introduction, but it is immeasurably enriched by his grasp of the historical contradictions. These he detects and analyses with a surprisingly high degree of clarity and refinement.

To Baranī, the external problems of the Sultanate throughout the period of his narrative remained of secondary importance in comparison to internal tensions. In so far as the "Hindu" principalities in India were concerned, they posed little threat to the Sultanate. The process of the extension of the Sultanate was, on the other hand, determined not by the potential resistance of these principalities but by the ability of the Sultanate to absorb annexation. Baranī quotes Balban (1266-86) to the effect that six to seven thousand Delhi horsemen could overthrow a hundred thousand strong army of infantry and archers (*pāyak o dhānuk*) of the Hindu *ra'is* and *rānās*.² But Balban said he desisted from sending out expeditions because the conquered region (*iqlim*) would require for its governance the despatch of a large number of nobles, officials, cavalry and infantry. These being placed at a distance from Delhi would be liable to defy his authority and rebel.³ Conquests would thus be self-defeating, so long as the Sultanate did not develop a sufficient degree of internal cohesion.

Elliot comments on Baranī's failure to provide a complete and proper list of the Mongol invasions.⁴ As early a critic as Firishtā suspected Baranī of suppressing the account of a raid where the Sultan had possibly not given a creditable account of himself.⁵ But such considerations have not weighed with Baranī in other matters. If

1 That for much of his *Tā'rikh* Baranī relied on memory and oral testimony needs no stressing; he says this repeatedly. But it would seem that Baranī had read the principal historical works of his period that he names in his Introduction (*Tā'rikh*, p. 14). Certainly, he seems to have formed his understanding of the conditions of the Sultanate on the eve of the accession of Balban by a very intelligent reading of Minhāj Sirāj's *Ṭabaqāt-i Nāsiri*. But when he writes he copies none; he seems to have obtained his information from the sources and cast it freely in his own narrative.

2 *Tā'rikh*, p. 52.

3 Ibid. pp. 51-2.

4 *The History of India As Told by Its Own Historians*, iii, 95.

5 *Tā'rikh-i Firishtā*, i (Nawal Kishore, Kanpur, 1874), 134, where Baranī is censured for not mentioning Tarmāshīrīn's raid. The accusation is unjust since even 'Iṣāmī, who is totally hostile to Muḥammad Tughluq and gives a detailed account of the raid, says nothing which is to the discredit of the Sultan in the entire episode (*Fuṭūḥ's Salāṭīn*, ed. A.S. Usha, Madras, 1948, pp. 462-5). Baranī is further exonerated since Tarmāshīrīn's raid is described in his earlier draft of the *Tā'rikh-i Firūz Shāhī*, which Simon Digby has discovered (personal information for the reference to Tarmāshīrīn's raid; the recension is referred to in Simon Digby, *War-Horse and Elephant in the Delhi Sultanate*, Oxford, 1971, p. 24 fns, pp. 25, 28 fns, p. 38 fns, p. 54 & fn., p. 58 & fn., p. 59 fn., p. 83).

he paid less attention to chronicling the Mongol invasions, it was probably because he was less concerned with their details than with their effects on the domestic affairs of the Sultanate. Hence his emphasis on the political vacuum caused by the death of Prince Muḥammad at the hands of the Mongols;¹ or the promulgation of price-control measures by 'Alā'uddīn Khaljī (1296-1316) to enable him to employ a large army to check Mongol raids.²

Baranī's essential concern, then, is with the course of developments within the Sultanate; and we can examine his conception of these developments by taking up separately his views on their internal mechanics, as expressed in the changes in the fortunes of its ruling class, and the relationship of that class with other elements in society. Baranī is a historian with a declared class bias; and it is, perhaps, best to deal with him frankly on his own terms.

Central to the long-term success of the ruling class, comprising persons who shared in the revenues of the state, was its unified existence; and this could only be achieved through the institution of despotic monarchy. Baranī affirms that "the terror of absolute authority (*'ulū'l amri*)" is "the (only) means of regulation and arrangement (lit. cure), and the cause of upholding government and administration".³

What kind of institution, then, is despotic monarchy? Baranī makes Balban say that "in worldly matters, the king is the viceregent of God";⁴ or, even more, that "the heart of kings is the receptacle of the sight of God (*manẓar-i-rabbāni*); and this sight is wonderful and has nothing to do with the sight of other sons of Adam".⁵ But Baranī is too much of a realist to remain in such clouds. He himself counters this pretended "divine" basis of monarchy by the confession he ascribes to Jalālu'ddīn Khaljī. Royalty is all deception and exhibition. Although externally it has ornament and trappings, yet inside it is impotent and contemptible (*zār zār*).⁶ The retort that Jalālu'ddīn Khaljī's critics made to this self-deprecation touched reality most closely: "Royalty is nothing but terror, power and the claim to unshared authority".⁷ In other words, the despotic power of the sovereign does not come ordained from God, but has to be established by force; it is the product of a historical process. Much of Baranī's narrative precisely consists of a delineation of this process within the Delhi Sultanate.

At the beginning of the period with which he deals, that is, the time of Balban's accession (1266), the Sultan's power had practically dissolved.⁸ Baranī gives a cogent account of Balban's effort to resurrect that power. He uses extensive, though

1 *Tā'rikh*, pp. 109-10.

2 *Ibid.* pp. 301-4.

3 *Ibid.* p. 29.

4 *Ibid.* p. 35.

5 *Ibid.* p. 70.

6 *Ibid.* p. 179.

7 *Ibid.* p. 180. The critics were the "vain, upstart and young" nobles who were thirsting for shoving aside the older nobility.

8 *Tā'rikh*, pp. 25-7.

presumably fictitious, quotations from Balban to explain his understanding of Balban's objectives and practical measures.¹ But Balban in his endeavour to impose royal authority also exposed the risks of such authority. He was ostentatious in his devotion to the faith;² for safeguarding his position, he perpetrated punishments on members of the ruling class and their dependents which were the most fearful departures from Muslim law. As Baranī states:

Sultan Balban, with all his sense of affection and benevolence, and justice and equity, and fasts and prayers, already described, was cruel and terrible in the punishment of rebellion; and...in the moment of inflicting terror and exercising power he had no fear of God....He did whatever he thought expedient for his own transitory power, whether permitted or prohibited by the Sharī'at.³

Baranī describes actual episodes, portraying Balban as both a secret murderer⁴ and the author of massacres on a grand scale.⁵ Understandably Baranī is horrified particularly by actions against members of the ruling class; Balban's ferocious measures against peasants, for example, leave no visible effect on his equanimity.⁶

But though Baranī might lament Balban's acts of terror, he yet sees them as the inevitable accompaniments of the Sultan's power; he was ready to concede that "the affairs of kingship involve (a combination of) cruelty and benevolence; and kingship subsists in (such) opposite qualities".⁷ When Jalālu'ddīn Khaljī (1290-6) abandoned the policy of terror, instead of winning gratitude from the nobility, he only excited their contempt and opened the path to treason.⁸

As Baranī describes 'Alā'uddīn Khaljī's seizure of the crown, conquests and administrative, fiscal and market-control measures, he is not unappreciative of the Sultan's achievements. Certain groups were deprived of their property, but wealth was not barred from "the houses of the nobles (*mulūk*), commanders (*umarā'*), bureaucrats (*kārdārān*), Multānīs (merchants) and *sāhs* (bankers)".⁹ Yet Baranī's applause, unlike

1 Peter Hardy ("The *oratio recta* of Baranī's *Tārīkh-i Firuz Shāhī*—Fact or Fiction", *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies*, xx, 1957, 315-21) grapples with the problem of the historicity of the quotations. It would, I think, be fair to assume that Baranī's quotations are quite often a literary device to avoid the tedium of a long third person account. He puts into the mouths of his characters of the earlier generations what, on general grounds, he thought they believed in or what explained their particular policies or practical measures. His quotations from Balban are the longest partly because otherwise he has so few specific facts of that reign to offer and partly because he could foist some of his own ideas on Balban, in whose mouth, given his actual policies, they would not sound unnatural.

2 Amīr Ḥasan Sijzī, *Fawā'idu'l-Fuwād*, ed, Latif Malik (Lahore, 1966), p. 393 (Conversation, 26 Zilhajja 719=7 February 1320). See also Baranī's statements in *Tārīkh*, pp. 46-7.

3 *Tārīkh*, p. 47.

4 Ibid. pp. 47-8.

5 Ibid. pp.91-3, 107-8.

6 See, for example, his description of the slaughter of the male population of Katchr villages (*Tārīkh*, p.39).

7 *Tārīkh*, pp. 167-8.

8 Ibid. pp.205-7.

9 Ibid. pp.283-4.

that of 'Isāmī,¹ is tempered by a sense of the moral and physical costs. The Sultan outdid the pharaohs in blood-shedding,² inflicted the most cruel punishments on enemies and suspects, as well as on those who were "innocent and ignorant". It was he who initiated the practice of seizing women and children of rebel officers, and sanctioned the extermination and humiliation of families, "a cruelty not perpetrated under any religion or faith".³

Baranī repeatedly refers to the futility of 'Alā'uddīn Khaljī's measures when his own family could not survive his death by more than four years.⁴ But this, indeed, was the insoluble dilemma. The possession of power required a proportionate exercise of terror; but the latter once initiated became itself a major element of instability. Once instability set in again, terror in the next round of the cycle could only be greater.

The truth of this was borne upon Baranī during the reign of Muḥammad Tughluq (1325-51). The historian cannot but break out in admiration at the Sultan's success in the completion of conquests within India, and the immense centralization of authority that he achieved in his early years. Never before had such wealth poured into Delhi; the distant regions were now being controlled with the same close scrutiny as the Doab.⁵ The Sultan was benevolent and generous to excess.⁶ And yet he began perpetrating cruelties and executions on a scale that put even the grim past into the shade.⁷ Baranī speaks of "the contradictory qualities" of the Sultan's character.⁸ But he himself offers an explanation of how these contradictions were themselves a response to the situation that existed.

As the Sultan sought further to strengthen his authority and issued a spate of new regulations ("imaginary, impracticable", says Baranī), the officials failed to enforce them; as they were punished, "the hatred of the people gave rise to rebellions and disturbances".⁹ These could be suppressed only by harsher and harsher punishments. The cycle could not be contained;¹⁰ and the respite came only with the death of Muḥammad Tughluq (1351).

One source of tragedy for the Sultanate lay, as Baranī saw it, in the frightful terror that the increasing power of the Sultan generated; the other lay in the growing instability in the composition of the ruling class.

Baranī repeatedly proclaims his devotion to the rights and status of the high-born and is loud in voicing his fear of and hostility to persons of low birth. He does so both by way of

1 *Futuhu's Salāṭīn*, pp. 313-5, 165.

2 *Tā'rikh*, pp. 237, 336 (massacre of twenty to thirty thousand neo-Muslim Mongol subjects), 339 (several thousands in prison). See also pp. 206-7.

3 *Tā'rikh*, p. 253.

4 *Ibid.* p. 237. "What has happened to his house and family has not happened in any pagan or infidel or Mongol land". He refers, of course, to what happened under Quṭb-ud-dīn Mubārak Shāh and then under his assassin Khusrau Khān.

5 *Tā'rikh*, pp. 468-9.

6 *Ibid.* pp. 460-2. Cf. Ibn Battūta, *Rihla* (Beirut, 1964), p. 441ff.

7 *Tā'rikh*, pp. 459, 465ff.

8 *Ibid.* p. 459 (*awqāf-l mutāzadda*).

9 *Tā'rikh*, pp. 470-1.

10 See statements made to Baranī by the Sultan himself, *Tā'rikh*, pp. 509-11, 522. These appear to be genuine quotations; for one thing, there is no verbosity or pompousness about them.

direct statement and by quotations ascribed to historical figures. This status-by-birth complex of Barani has naturally attracted comment from scholars, and there is a notably lucid analysis of his views by Professor Mohammad Habib.¹

It is important to stress that Barani's addiction to the principle of birth does not derive from any theory of blue blood: it derives principally from a craving for security and stability for those who are already "in possession". This can be seen from his treatment of the Turkish slaves of Iltutmish. Barani is clear that when they established their supremacy after the death of Iltutmish (1236) by overthrowing the free nobility, the Turkish slaves, too, were upstarts with no claims to hereditary status. As he notes:

The people of that period observed how until the great and the powerful do not fall from their positions of greatness and power, contemptible men and purchased slaves do not rise and become supreme and powerful.²

But as the upstarts sufficiently established their authority and Balban, who was one of them, became Sultan, Barani perforce accepts their claims to high birth, though established merely by the passage of time. The highest nobles now were those who had been the fellow-slaves (*khwājātāshān*) of the Sultan.³ Barani extols Balban's firmness in his assuring a monopoly of the "high-born" over all offices. The "low-born" seeking entrance into the ruling class were either descendants of artisans or of Hindu slaves.⁴ It was this kind of attempted subversion of the monopoly of the "insiders" that excited Barani's bitter hostility to the lower classes. He approved of Balban's refusal to be guided by "obedience and loyalty" as the sole criteria in making appointments,⁵ and a suitable anecdote is said to have been told by Balban to show that Iltutmish, too, had warned against the low-born (*kam-aslān*) being appointed on grounds of competence (*munarmandī*).⁶

Barani here lays bare the contradiction between the claims of a closed hereditary class and the need for loyalty and competence. Even his portrayal of Balban has a suggestion of inherent weakness masked by pomp and show.⁷ Balban could not expand the

1 *Political Theory of the Delhi Sultanate*, pp. 144-51.

2 *Tārīkh*, p. 27. Barani shows a rare consistency of conception when he makes Balban describe 'Izzu'ddīn Sālārī and Malik Quṭbuddīn Ḥasan Ghaurī as the great exponents of the principle of high birth at Iltutmish's court (*Tārīkh*, pp. 21, 26). Both were non-Turk, free-born nobles (Minhāj Sirāj, *Tabaqāt-i Nāsirī*, ed. Abū'l Hai Habībī, Kabul, 1963-4, i, 446, 452, 476 and ii, 4, for Malik 'Izzu'ddīn Muḥammad Shāh Sālārī Maḥdī, and i, 378, 381, 452, 475-6 for Quṭbuddīn Ḥasan). There was grim irony in the reference to Quṭbuddīn Ḥasan made through the mouth of Balban, for Quṭbuddīn Ḥasan, when he was nominally the holder of the highest office (*nā'ib-i mulk*) had been seized and executed in 1355 by Balban himself (*ibid.* i, 489). His murder in fact symbolized the elimination of the free nobility by the Turkish slaves.

3 *Tārīkh*, p. 37.

4 *Ibid.* p. 39, for the discovery (narrated by Balban) that Nizāmu'l Mulk Junaidī, minister of Iltutmish, was descended from a weaver, which explained his readiness to recommend men of low birth for appointment. Balban himself refused to appoint Kamāl Maḥyār to the post of *Khawāja* of Amroha, because, being the son of a Hindu slave, he was low-born (*Tārīkh*, p. 36).

5 *Tārīkh*, p. 29.

6 *Ibid.* p. 38.

7 *Ibid.* pp. 30-1. Barani says that Iltutmish had greater military strength than Balban, but Balban more than made up the deficiency by his display of grandeur.

gardener, a weaver, a *māli* ("the lowest and basest caste of all the mean and low-born of Hind and Sind") and a *bāzrān* of Indri (?) ("the basest of the base-born").¹

Since Baranī also mentions the offices held by these men and he was writing so close to the events, and with the knowledge of a courtier, there is no reason to doubt the accuracy of the facts he gives. What one can argue is that Muḥammad Tughluq in the effort to extend and maintain his power also recruited a very large number of Mongol and foreign nobility, which Baranī records,² and which, according to Ibn Battūta, led to disaffection among the more indigenous ("Hindi") nobility.³ Baranī remains curiously unprovoked by this foreign influx. Even more curious, in view of his strongly expressed disapproval of the power acquired by "Barwars and Hindus" under Khusrau Khān,⁴ is his lack of indignation at the appointment of Hindus to high offices by Muḥammad Tughluq: while 'Iṣāmī justifies the murder of Bharan, the governor of Gulberga, on the ground that he was a Hindu,⁵ Baranī considers the act as nothing but "treachery".⁶

The main content of the political history of the Delhi Sultanate as seen by Baranī, then, consists of three simultaneous developments: the growth of despotic power of the Sultan, the greater and greater use of terror, and, finally, the successive wholesale changes in the composition of the nobility, tending to its plebeianization. He does not say so (and he might well not have agreed, had the question been put to him), but the three processes, according to his own account, formed the fundamental element in the success of the Sultanate. What he is able to demonstrate effectively is that these factors inevitably led to a crisis under Muḥammad Tughluq, when large sections of the Delhi nobility itself, especially the military officers—the *amīrān-i sada*—went into rebellion.⁷ The entire Sultanate seemed as if diseased.⁸

Baranī depicts in his account of the reign of Fīrūz Tughluq (accession 1351) the proclaimed cure for the malady: royal power is weakened;⁹ the use of terror is abjured;¹⁰ and the nobility is assured of stability.¹¹ But the great ambitions, the breath-taking ventures, too, have gone.

If what happened to the ruling class supplies the main thread of Baranī's narrative, it does not mean that he overlooks the other components of society. On a superficial

1 *Tā'rikh*, p. 505.

2 Ibid. pp. 462, 499.

3 Ibn Battūta, *Rihla*, p. 490.

4 *Tā'rikh*, pp. 409-13.

5 'Iṣāmī, *Fuṣūhu's Salāṭīn*, pp. 484-8.

6 *Tā'rikh*, p. 488.

7 *Tā'rikh*, p. 501ff., for the conflict with *amīrān-i sada* and other rebels. For Muḥammad Tughluq's remarks to Baranī on the disaffection among the *amīrān-i sada*, see pp. 516-7.

8 *Tā'rikh*, p. 521 (Muḥammad Tughluq's admission to Baranī).

9 *Tā'rikh*, pp. 578-9, mentions the delegation of absolute powers to Wazīr Khān Jahān, the like of which no previous Sultan had given to anyone. On pp. 555-6, Baranī describes the lifting of the rigour and harshness in the auditing of accounts of nobles.

10 *Tā'rikh*, pp. 547-8, 551-2.

11 Ibid. pp. 549-52, 555.

view he appears to treat these components at two levels, in religious terms as communities and in sociological terms as classes.

Baranī was well-read in Islamic law, history and other traditional sciences.¹ He asserts his orthodoxy, by implication at least, when he makes it a prerequisite for a historian.² He applauds the suppression of philosophy,³ and inveighs against rationalism.⁴ And yet the use of the theological idiom by him ought not to be overstressed.⁵ Baranī's sudden and surprising commendation of Mansūr Ḥajjāj, explicitly for his achievement of salvation by annihilation and his seemingly blasphemous declaration of pantheism, can hardly have come from a theologian of any real orthodox pretensions.⁶ His frequent references to Sharī'at notwithstanding, it is clear that he was conscious of its futility. In a long text of counsels ascribed to Balban, the enforcement of the Sharī'at is coolly classed among obligations which rulers could no longer undertake in the contemporary epoch.⁷

In conformity with such realism, Baranī's attitude towards the Muslims in general is by no means one of idealizing the Prophet's flock. He does see in them a major support of the Sultanate. He shows Balban saying that upon conquering a region, he would need to send "the Governor, commanders, revenue-collectors, functionaries, cavalry and infantry", numbering, with their dependents, a hundred thousand persons in all. A little later, his words show that these would be all, or mostly, Muslims.⁸ This was certainly all to the good; but Baranī saw the generality of Muslims with some apprehension and hostility. It was mainly from amongst them that the low-born arose and entered the ruling class with all the lamentable consequences flowing from such intrusion. On this we have already seen what his views were. He remembered with apparent nostalgia how out of their attachment to the dignity of the throne the citizens of Delhi would not accept the sovereignty of the Khaljīs.⁹ Thirty years later, a large number of Muslims would readily accept Khusrau Khān as the Sultan or remain passive.¹⁰ Such erosion of respect among Muslims for the established hierarchy made them, at best, an infirm base.

This takes us to Baranī's view of the relationship between the Sultanate and the

1 Ibid. p. 9. Though Baranī does not go out of his way to flaunt his knowledge, his easy familiarity with the theology and past of Islam is noticeable at many places in the *Tārīkh* and his other works. He hardly ever makes any ignorant slips.

2 *Tārīkh*, pp. 14-6.

3 Ibid. p. 43.

4 Ibid. p. 465.

5 P. Hardy, *Historians of Medieval India*, p. 115. I cannot find any authority in Baranī's own writing for the claim made in the same study (p. 118) that for him "the study of history was the study of God, not of man; the past is a commentary upon the Divine Purpose for men, a vehicle of Revelation". I do not, in any case, think Baranī would have agreed with the last statement, more so if he was an orthodox theologian.

6 *Tārīkh*, p. 459.

7 Ibid. pp. 70-5.

8 Ibid. pp. 51-2.

9 Ibid. pp. 172-3.

10 Ibid. pp. 412-3: only a minority (*andaktar*) were positively hostile to Khusrau Khān, he says.

Hindus. Baranī is sure in his own mind that the humiliation and even annihilation of the Hindus was required by a literal reading of the Sharī'at; distress constantly inflicted on Hindus should, therefore, give the faithful much satisfaction. For this Baranī, as is his wont, produces suitable "quotations" from Sultans and religious figures.¹ But if Baranī was sure about what the Sharī'at demanded he was also as certain about what policy, or the interest of the Sultanate ruling class, required. In his *Sahifa-i Nā't-i Muḥammadi* he makes Nizāmu'l-Mulk Junaidī, the minister of Iltutmish, protest that Muslims were merely like salt in one's food, and to proceed to a slaughter or forced conversion of the Hindus would bring about an uncontrollable conflagration.²

In his *Tā'rikh*, Baranī is greatly attracted by this contradiction between the demands of religion and worldly expediency. Balban urges in a set of advices the destruction of the brahmans, but proceeds to say that such counsels were not "suitable" for either himself or his son.³ Jalālu'ddīn Khaljī is not willing to lose lives in an attack on the Hindus of Ranthambhor when in his own capital the Hindus had full freedom to follow their rites and live in ease.⁴ In describing 'Alā'uddīn Khaljī's agrarian measures Baranī treats the impoverishment of the village headmen (*khūts* and *muqaddams*) as a welcome humiliation of "the Hindus".⁵ And yet he sees that a continuous pressure on the rural aristocracy would have led to agrarian devastation: therefore, overlooking the coincidence between 'Alā'uddīn Khaljī's measures and the demands of the Sharī'at, he applauds Ghiyāsu'ddīn Tughluq's decision to give concessions to the *khūts* and *muqaddams* so that their prosperity might be restored.⁶

As he came closer to his own day, he found the Hindus becoming more and more integrated into the political system of the Sultanate. He might not have agreed, but the *Khusrau Khān* episode (1320) (so bitterly denounced by Baranī) was only a short-term disturbance in the longer process of integration. It is singular that Baranī desists from criticizing Muḥammad Tughluq for his tolerant attitude towards the Hindus and Hinduism, a crime for which his contemporary and fellow-historian 'Iṣāmī even demanded the Sultan's head.⁷

1 See, for example, *Tā'rikh*, pp. 41-2, 102-3, 217, 290-1. Baranī puts in the mouth of Qāzī Muḥib (speaking before 'Alā'uddīn Khaljī) the statement that except for the Hanafite school ("which is the school we follow"), the other schools do not even regard Hindus as eligible for the status of tax-paying subjects: they have the option to be killed or accept Islam (pp. 290-1). Baranī attributes similar views to the theologians at the court of Iltutmish in his *Sahifa-i Nā't-i Muḥammadi*, extract reproduced in *Medieval India Quarterly*, i, nos 3-4, 104-5 (translation and comment by S. Nurul Hasan on pp. 101-3).

2 *Medieval India Quarterly*, i, nos 3-4, 105.

3 *Tā'rikh*, pp. 102-3.

4 *Ibid.* pp. 216-8.

5 *Ibid.* pp. 287, 290-1. On the "restricted sense" of "Hindus" here, see W. H. Moreland's perceptive remarks in his *Agrarian System of Moslem India* (Cambridge, 1929), pp. 32 fn., 225, 230.

6 *Tā'rikh*, p. 430. As is usual with Baranī, he coins a maxim to rationalize the new policy: "The Hindu is not to be allowed to be excessively rich so as to become proud and rebellious, nor so poor as to leave agriculture and tillage".

7 *Futūhu's Salāṣīn*, p. 515. Baranī even passes by the Hindi name Muḥammad Tughluq gave to his temporary capital on the Ganga, Svargadvārī (Gate of Heaven) without comment (*Tā'rikh*, p. 485).

On the contrary, when Baranī describes Muhammad Tughlūq's accession (1351), he speaks of "Muslims and Hindus" praying for the new Sultan.¹ When Fīrūz Tughlūq occupied the throne (1351), "the hearts of Muslims and Hindus were united."² He thus assumes a Hindu attachment to the Sultanate, which in its very essence is quite impressive. Writing in 1357 he praises Fīrūz Tughlūq for securing prosperity for the *khūṣ* and *muqaddams*, who had now numberless horses and cattle.³ This is a lot cry from his admiration of 'Alā'uddīn Khālījī for depriving these very "Hindus" of their horses.⁴

Clearly, then, Baranī is not a blind communalist, and his harsh denigration of "Hindus" ought not to obscure the substantive argument that lies underneath, in his highlighting of the contradiction between religious theory and political practice. In essence, Baranī did perceive the inevitability of an accommodation between the Sultanate and the upper classes of its Hindu subjects.

It is possible that Baranī's supreme merit lies in his perception of the economic basis of the Sultanate, within whose framework this process of accommodation took place. Baranī saw the Delhi Sultanate as an urban polity sustained by the exploitation of a large agrarian society. Nowhere is this perception clearer than in the account of 'Alā'uddīn Khālījī's measures. With a clarity and closeness of argument, that has not perhaps received due credit, Baranī shows how the extraction of a larger surplus from the villages was undertaken through collecting half the grain in tax, levying other taxes and reducing the income of the rural aristocracy;⁵ how this enabled large supplies of grain to Delhi to be assured; and how with control of this basic lever, 'Alā'uddīn Khālījī was able to lower prices in Delhi, doubtless by taking a number of other measures which Baranī does not overlook.⁶ Baranī was not naive enough to think that these measures resulted in simple public welfare, a view held by others who tended to see lower prices as an end in themselves.⁷ Not only did he see the entire mechanism as being adverse to the interests of the agrarian classes; he also saw that lower prices meant lower wages. Indeed, the low prices themselves were a partial response to low incomes ("the moneylessness of the people"): "A camel went for a copper, but who had a copper?"⁸ Its one net result was that a very large army could be maintained at low pay⁹ which in itself

1 *Tārīkh*, p. 457.

2 *Ibid.* p. 547.

3 *Ibid.* p. 554.

4 *Ibid.* pp. 287-8, 291.

5 *Ibid.* pp. 287-91.

6 *Ibid.* pp. 303-19.

7 For example, Shaikh Naṣīru'ddīn in *Khairu'l Majālis*, ed. K. A. Nizami (Aligarh, 1959), p. 241 ("again of all people"). This work was compiled some time after 1353.

The low wages of artisans under 'Alā'uddīn Khālījī are recalled by 'Ainu'l Mulk "Māhrū" in *Inshā-i Māhrū*, ed. S. A. Rashid and M. Bashir Hussain (Lahore, 1965), p. 240. In his earlier draft Baranī illustrates the low wages by actually citing low tailoring charges for a robe (information owed to Simon Digby).

8 *Tārīkh*, p. 312.

9 *Ibid.* pp. 303-4, 319.

should have meant a larger urban population. There was also some relief in the towns during scarcities.¹ These results were of great advantage to the ruling class and of distinct benefit to the urban economy. It is true that Baranī speaks with some satisfaction of the suppression of the activities of brokers and hoarders;² but the merchants were clearly prosperous. "Multānīs (Hindu merchants) and *sāhs* (bankers; principal traders)" are mentioned by Baranī as the only wealthy people besides the nobles and bureaucrats under 'Alā'uddīn *Khajī*.³ He says earlier that the Multānīs had flourished by lending money to Turkish nobles as advances against the revenues from their *iqtā's*;⁴ and they received loans from 'Alā'uddīn *Khajī*.⁵ Baranī mentions the "marketmen, merchants, principal men, *sāhs*, *ṣarrāfs* (money-changers and bankers)" together with brahmans as going to Firūz Tughluq's camp to welcome him;⁶ later he tells us of their acquisitions of "lakhs and crores" under that sovereign.⁷ Baranī hardly ever thinks of these mercantile classes when he speaks of the repression of "Hindus"; these were indeed the natural allies of the ruling classes, however much he might himself regard a merchant and a man-of-the-market to be a person of low status.⁸

The relationship with the rural aristocracy was, however, far more complex. The contradiction between it and the Sultanate ruling class over the share in the agrarian surplus made Baranī see it as a potential enemy, representing the only opposing group of "Hindus". Yet, he realized that it was not possible to collect land revenue without the support of these petty rural potentates. As we have seen, he was not averse to the concessions made to it by Ghiyāṣuddīn Tughluq.⁹ He describes, with disapproval, Muḥammad Tughluq's reversal of this policy, through an increase in taxation, which led to a large-scale agrarian uprising led by the *khūṭs* and *muqaddams*. Grain supplies to Delhi were cut off; a famine followed—"from that day the glory of the government of Sultan Muḥammad paled and declined".¹⁰ Just as he saw the strength of 'Alā'uddīn *Khajī*'s regime in its success in exploiting the countryside, so he is quick to trace Muḥammad Tughluq's failure to the new agrarian crisis. It simply defied solution; and agriculture would not recover in spite of Muḥammad Tughluq's innovative schemes for agricultural development.¹¹

According to Baranī, conditions changed with Firūz Tughluq. The *khūṭs* and

1 Ibid. pp. 308-9.

2 This is interspersed through the account of price-control measures, pp. 303-19.

3 *Tārīkh*, p. 284. For the significance of "Multānī", see the celebrated eighteenth-century dictionary of Munshi Tekchand "Bahār", *Bahār-i 'Ajam*, s.v.

4 *Tārīkh*, p. 120.

5 Ibid. p. 311.

6 Ibid. p. 546.

7 Ibid. p. 554. *Sipāhān* in the printed text should read *sāhān*.

8 Quoting Balban (*Tārīkh*, pp. 33-4). He severely criticizes Ḥamīd Multānī's appointment as *qāḍī* of the Empire on grounds of his belonging to a Multānī or mercantile and usurious family (*Tārīkh*, pp. 298, 352).

9 *Tārīkh*, p. 120.

10 Ibid. pp. 472-3, 479-80.

11 Ibid. pp. 498-9.

muqaddams could now enjoy unprecedented prosperity.¹ Implicit in his own previous statements is the assumption that such prosperity implied a curtailment of the share of rural produce coming to towns and a challenge to the authority of the Sultanate ruling class. But Baranī was now writing as a eulogist of the reigning sovereign; and we cannot, therefore, expect him to paint the end of his story with the same acuteness as he had shown in telling the main parts of it.

Such is my reading of Baranī's conception of the history of the Delhi Sultanate. Baranī's point of view is not one which evokes an instinctive response from a modern reader: change is detestable to Baranī; he craves stability and hierarchy; and, above all, he seeks the wealth and welfare of the ruling class. Not quite integrated with this is his assumption that the aristocracy, being Muslim, should uphold orthodoxy. He sees in the actual history of the Delhi Sultanate a contrary process—constant change, untrammelled despotism, vast increase in the wealth and power of the ruling class, with repeated sweeping alterations in its composition, and the inapplicability of the Sharī'at. He does not consider individuals as robots; the very fact of despotism meant that the character of the despot could become of crucial importance to the shaping of the historical process. But Baranī is always conscious of the social environment within which the action takes place. He is remarkable in looking for the effects of that action not on particular individuals, but on classes and groups. Moreland may be right in believing that Baranī treats the mass, that is, the ordinary peasants and other oppressed strata of people, as the "herd",² and so outside the theatre of historical action. But in so far as control over what they produced was central to Baranī's interest, they yet figure in his account as the object if not the subject of history.

Baranī was not a man of vision, but his was a mind of immense comprehension and lucidity. It was a measure of these qualities that he could see things with the eye of a learned theologian as well as a worldly courtier, and yet, on occasion, speak a language that the economist and social scientist of today would find familiar. He is a believer in the reality of class conflicts, stand though he may on the wrong side of the barricades. A modern historian can hardly side with Baranī in his commendations and denunciations; but can he write a persuasive history of the Sultanate without accepting in large part Baranī's interpretation of the main processes of change within it?

1 Ibid. p. 554.

2 *Agrarian System of Moslem India*, p. 32fn.